

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Administration to Advance Asia, Western Hemisphere Trade Deals

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington – Senior Obama administration officials say they are prepared to move forward on free trade agreements with South Korea, Panama and Colombia, deals one official says “are very much part of the president’s overall agenda of growing the economy, expanding exports and supporting jobs.”

Several senior administration officials held a background briefing on trade by conference call May 4.

“The South Korea agreement itself supports more than 70,000 U.S. jobs and is expected to increase exports by over \$10 billion a year,” one official said, adding that deals with Colombia and Panama are also “very important” to meeting job creation and export expansion goals.

The official said the Obama administration views the agreements as a “critical part of our overall national export initiative and strategy, with the goal of doubling exports over the next five years.”

Another official added that the deals are “well-balanced agreements that address our core interests and our values,” and that benefit both the United States and its partners. For example, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke has said South Korea, through a free trade pact, would secure increased investments in its \$580 billion service industries, preferential access to the world’s largest consumer market and a tariff edge over global competitors.

Obama administration officials have said governments, businesses and civilians of the other two countries would share similar benefits.

The agreements would allow the United States to cooperate with three very diverse economies, each contributing to the U.S. economy in a unique way, according to one official on the call. In addition to job creation from the South Korea agreement and a potential boost in U.S. gross domestic product from the Colombian deal, the official said Panama offers the potential of major infrastructure projects, as well as a significant market for U.S. exports and service providers.

The officials said the next step to formalizing the deals will be to meet with congressional staff for consultations.

U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk sent a letter to Congress May 4 saying that based on discussions with

Colombian leaders and progress made since the last talks on issues such as labor rights, the United States is now ready to move toward formalizing the trade pact. The other two countries have also made changes in preparation for enactment of the agreements.

The officials said Senator Max Baucus (Democrat from Montana), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, has announced his support for moving forward with all three free trade agreements.

An official said that with these steps, the Obama administration “now will begin to initiate that legislative process toward approval of all three.”

NASA Remembers First U.S. Manned Space Flight

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington – America’s national space agency is marking the 50th anniversary of the United States’ entry into manned space flight May 5. Commemorative events, including a re-enactment of the flight, are being celebrated at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Alan Shepard was the American who bore the nation’s hopes beyond Earth’s atmosphere for the first time, but he was not the first human to enter that realm. A mere three weeks earlier, Russian Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin was the first human being to journey into outer space, aboard a spacecraft that completed an orbit of the Earth on April 12, 1961. It was the Cold War era, and space became another forum where the two superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – each tried to prove superiority.

The United States took its first step to leave Earth in 1958 with the launch of the Mercury Project, a concerted effort devoted to the goal of putting a human being in space. An elite crew of men, the first ever known as astronauts, were chosen for the program. Shepard, a U.S. Navy test pilot who had served in World War II, was selected for the first flight aboard a craft known as Freedom 7.

Knowing what we know now about space flight – the construction of a space station, flights that have become routine – the modest goals of the Mercury Project seem almost quaint. Quoting NASA accounts of the period, those goals were “to orbit a manned spacecraft around Earth; to investigate man’s ability to function in space; and to recover both man and spacecraft safely.”

Today, anyone with a television can see video of astronauts floating weightless aboard the craft with their hair standing on end; clowning to amuse flight controllers in Houston; or performing complex tasks in an awkward

suit, tethered to safety by a thin coil, with the vast blackness of space behind them. But scientists did not know any of these feats were possible in 1961. The Mercury Project had to see what a human being would be capable of doing way up there, in a hostile environment unlike any humanity had known before.

"That had to be pretty frightening, right?" Alan Shepard was asked that question many times, he told an interviewer years later.

"Fortunately, I wasn't scared. Nervous, but not frightened to death," Shepard is quoted in an interview on the website of the Academy of Achievement. "You have to be trained to the point where you absolutely are not panicked."

And he was trained. NASA had built flight simulators, so when rocket liftoff came, Shepard said, he was all business: "You've done it in the simulator so many times, you don't have a real sense of being excited when the flight is going on."

The Freedom 7 flight lasted a mere 15 minutes, 28 seconds. Shepard had little time for reflection.

"I remember just reaching the apex of the trajectory, when I was going to be in the middle of the weightlessness, and I was looking at the periscope, and all of a sudden I said, 'You know, somebody is going to ask me how it feels to be weightless, so you better pay attention to how it feels to be weightless.' So I was going through the motions of flying, but at the same time trying to assess physiologically how I felt. Was I dizzy, or confused?"

Shepard's ride aboard Freedom 7 did not take him to orbit as Gagarin had done three weeks before. But Shepard, a pilot to the core, did something Gagarin had not: He exercised manual control over his spacecraft's attitude and retro-rocket firing.

Shepard remained with NASA, training and selecting astronauts, but did not return to space for another 10 years. In 1971, he was the commander of Apollo XIV. In a 10-day mission, with a crew of two other astronauts, Shepard flew to, landed on and walked upon the surface of the moon.

Shepard is also remembered as the astronaut who hit a couple of golf balls on the moon to demonstrate how objects will behave in a gravitational force one-sixth that of Earth.

"The balls are still up there," Shepard told the Academy of Achievement. "Perhaps the youngsters of today will go up and play golf with them some time, 25 or 30 years from now."

Shepard rose to the rank of admiral before his retirement. He died from leukemia in 1998 at the age of 74.

Celebrating Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders

By Louise Fenner and Lauren Monsen
Staff Writers

Washington — "I feel very fortunate to have two sets of cultures to enjoy — American and Vietnamese. Rather than divide my identity in half, these two sets of experience double my understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the world around me."

Writing these words on his website, which he has titled "Asian Nation," Vietnamese-born C.N. Le adds that he sees Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, which is celebrated in the United States every May, as an opportunity "to share in the accomplishments of all Asian Americans before me." Le is a professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Asian Americans include the well-known, such as actor Bruce Lee, the infantrymen of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team who fought in World War II and author Maxine Hong Kingston, Le says, as well as those who are not famous "but whose accomplishments are no less impressive and inspiring." He cites the Chinese workers on the transcontinental railroad, the Japanese Americans interned during World War II and "everyday Asian immigrant families who work tirelessly to improve their lives and build a future for their children."

President Obama praised the achievements of Asian Americans "in all facets of American life," citing a wide-ranging group that includes "athletes and public servants, entrepreneurs and artists" and also "proud members of the United States Armed Forces."

"From our earliest days, intrepid men and women from the Asia-Pacific region have forged enduring links between America and other nations as they moved across the Pacific," Obama said in an April 29, 2011, proclamation. "In today's globalized world, these bonds remain critical, reminding the United States of our rich shared history and integrated future with the dynamic Asia-Pacific region."

In recognition of "the millions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders whose talents and contributions strengthen our economy, protect our security, and enliven our country every day," the president said, "I call upon all Americans to visit www.AsianPacificHeritage.gov to learn more about the history of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and to observe this month with appropriate programs and activities."

In 2008, President George W. Bush singled out the veterans of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated Army unit that was composed mostly of volunteers recruited from U.S. internment camps during World War II. Despite the racial and cultural prejudice they faced, these soldiers “served America with distinction in eight battle campaigns in Europe,” Bush said, adding that the unit was “one of the most highly decorated in U.S. military history.”

Asians are the third-largest minority group – and the second-fastest-growing group – in the United States, according to the Census Bureau, which predicts that Asians will increase from 5 percent to 9 percent of the population by 2050.

The largest population of Asians is in California, with 5.6 million, followed by New York, Texas and Hawaii.

More Asian Americans claim Chinese heritage than any other background, followed by Filipinos, Indians, Vietnamese, Koreans and Japanese.

In addition to proclaiming special heritage months, the U.S. government celebrates America’s diversity through the “Outstanding Americans by Choice” awards, which have been presented since 2006 by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to recognize the professional accomplishments and civic participation of naturalized U.S. citizens.

About a dozen Asian Americans have been named Outstanding Americans by Choice. The award has been presented to about 60 naturalized citizens from virtually every continent. Among honorees are Indra Nooyi, chairman and chief executive of PepsiCo, and Renu Khator, chancellor of the University of Houston system, both born in India; Vietnamese-born Anh Duong, head of the Borders and Maritime Security Division in the Department of Homeland Security; and retired Major General John L. Fugh, who was born in Beijing and went on to become judge advocate general of the U.S. Army, responsible for legal affairs.

Two Asian Americans have been recognized by the Ellis Island Foundation with the Peopling of America Award, which honors immigrants who have made a major contribution to the American experience. In 2004, the first such award went to Chinese-born architect I.M. Pei, who came to America in 1935. He has designed more than 60 projects in the United States and abroad. In 2007, the award went to Josie Natori, who was born in the Philippines and came to America in 1964. She became the first female vice president of investment banking at Merrill Lynch and then entered the field of fashion, founding the Natori Company.

The contributions of Asian Americans were recognized officially in 1978, when a joint congressional resolution established Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week. President George H.W. Bush expanded it to a month in 1990, and two years later Congress made it official with a law designating May as Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month.

The Library of Congress states that the month of May was chosen because the first Japanese immigrants arrived in the United States on May 7, 1843; May also marks the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. The majority of the workers who laid the tracks were Chinese immigrants. Throughout the United States, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month is celebrated with community festivals, traditional foods, parades and cultural performances. Many schools and government offices hold educational and cultural events.

InfoTech Can Improve Health for Pregnant Moms and Babies

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington – A woman gives birth somewhere in the world every second, but in many places, “becoming a mother can be a dangerous, life-threatening undertaking,” Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said May 3 as she announced a new program designed to save the lives of both mothers and babies.

“Women in developing countries, some of the women most at risk for pregnancy-related problems, will be able to use their cell phones to get health information via text messaging or voice mails,” Clinton said of the program dubbed MAMA – Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action.

Clinton announced the initiative at the State Department, accompanied by representatives from other agencies inside and outside government who will help make MAMA a success. The MAMA program is getting under way in Bangladesh, India and South Africa with \$10 million in support.

Lending the effort some urgency, Clinton said that 360,000 women worldwide die in or shortly after childbirth every year, and 4 million babies die during birth or within a few weeks. Despite these grim statistics, the United States and other donor nations and organizations have made important progress in reducing what experts call the “maternal mortality ratio” by 34 percent in the developing world between 1990 and 2008. Nepal has reduced by half the number of mothers dying in childbirth, Clinton said.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is one of the partners behind MAMA. Deputy Administrator Donald Steinberg said the program will take advantage of the wildfire spread of mobile phones in the developing world. "Mobile health messages will inform women of ways to care for themselves during pregnancy, to dispel myths and misconceptions, to highlight warning signals, to connect women with local health services to reinforce breast-feeding practices, to explain the benefits of family planning, and to make new mothers aware of how to best care for their babies."

Johnson & Johnson, an infant and personal care product manufacturer, is another sponsor of the effort. "Cell phones are just about everywhere, and they represent a significant untapped resource for advancing health care," said William Weldon, chief executive officer and chairman of J & J, at the State Department briefing. His company has been involved in a similar program in the United States, text4baby, which, with its almost 170,000 subscribers, has demonstrated enough success to expand the program to Russia.

The U.S. chief technology officer, Aneesh Chopra, praised the text4baby program. "A physician from Virginia called to tell me, 'I know this is working, Aneesh, because more patients are coming in for their prenatal care visits. When my staff asks, [the patients say] 'I got a text message that I got to come in.'"

Chopra said MAMA will "leapfrog" technologies to help mothers in the developing world. Satellite phone capability can take MAMA connections to villages where telephone lines were never strung and television signals don't reach.

While Clinton is excited about the lifesaving potential of MAMA, she also has a larger vision. She said this text messaging program can be a "positive multiplier," with the potential to improve health and advance development in other aspects of life as well. "When women succeed they lift themselves, their families and their communities along with them," she said.

When the program is proven to be operative and effective it will expand to other nations, officials said.

Other partners in the MAMA initiative are the United Nations Foundation; BabyCenter, a global online parenting network, represented at the briefing by model and activist Christy Turlington Burns; and the mHealth Alliance, affiliated with the U.N. Foundation, working to use wireless technologies to improve health care in the developing world.

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